

Written: October 25, 1905

Source: Collected Works; Volume 9, p. 438-46

Published: Progress Publishers, Moscow, USSR, 1965

First Published: Proletary No. 24, 1905

Translated: Abraham Fineburg and Julius Katzer

Online Version: marx.org 1997; marxists.org 1999

Transcribed: Workers' Web ASCII Pamphlet project

HTML Markup: Brian Basgen and David Walters

Petty-bourgeois and Proletarian Socialism

Of the various socialist doctrines, Marxism is now predominant in Europe, the struggle for the achievement of a socialist order being almost entirely waged as a struggle of the working class under the guidance of the Social-Democratic parties. This complete predominance of proletarian socialism grounded in the teachings of Marxism was not achieved all at once, but only after a long struggle against all sorts of outworn doctrines, petty-bourgeois socialism, anarchism, and so on. Some thirty years ago, Marxism was not predominant even in Germany, where the prevailing views of the time were in fact transitional, mixed and eclectic, lying between petty-bourgeois and proletarian socialism. The most widespread doctrines among advanced workers in the Romance countries, in France, Spain and Belgium, were Proudhonism, Blanquism [1] and anarchism, which obviously expressed the viewpoint of the petty bourgeois, not of the proletarian.

What has been the cause of this rapid and complete victory of Marxism during the last decades? The correctness of the Marxist views has been confirmed to an ever greater extent by all the development of contemporary societies, both politically and economically, and by the whole experience of the revolutionary movement and of the struggle of the oppressed classes. The decline of the petty bourgeoisie inevitably led, sooner or later, to the extinction of all kinds of petty-bourgeois prejudices, while the growth of capitalism and the intensification of the class struggle within capitalist society were the best agitation for the ideas of proletarian socialism.

Russia's backwardness naturally accounts for the firm footing that various obsolete socialist doctrines gained in our country. The entire history of Russian revolutionary thought during the last quarter of a century is the history of the struggle waged by Marxism against petty-bourgeois Narodnik [2] socialism. While the rapid growth and remarkable successes of the Russian working-class movement have already brought victory to Marxism in Russia too, the development of an indubitably revolutionary peasant movement -- especially after the famous peasant revolts in the Ukraine in 1902 [3] -- has on the other hand caused a certain revival of senile Narodism. The Narodnik theories of old, embellished with modish European opportunism (revisionism, Bernsteinism [4] and criticism of Marx), make up all the original ideological stock-in-trade of the so-called Socialist-Revolutionaries [5]. That is why the peasant question is focal in the Marxists' controversies with both the pure Narodniks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

To a certain extent Narodism was an integral and consistent doctrine. It denied the domination of capitalism in Russia; it denied the factory workers' role as the front-line fighters of the entire proletariat; it denied the importance of a political revolution and bourgeois political liberty; it preached an immediate socialist revolution, stemming from the peasant commune with its petty forms of husbandry. All that now survives of this integral theory is mere shreds, but to understand the controversies of the present day intelligently, and to prevent these controversies from degenerating into mere squabbles, one should always remember the general and basic Narodnik roots of the errors of our Socialist-Revolutionaries.

The Narodniks considered the muzhik the man of the future in Russia, this view springing inevitably from their faith in the socialist character of the peasant commune, from their lack of faith in the future of capitalism. The Marxists considered the worker the man of the future in Russia, and the development of Russian capitalism in both agriculture and industry is providing more and more confirmation of their views. The working-class movement in Russia has won recognition for itself, but as for the peasant movement, the gulf separating Narodism and Marxism is to this day revealed in their different interpretations of this movement. To the Narodniks the peasant movement provides a refutation of Marxism. It is a movement that stands for a direct socialist revolution; it does not recognise bourgeois political liberty; it stems from small-scale, not large-scale, production. In a word, to the Narodnik, it is the peasant movement that is the genuine, truly socialist and immediately socialist movement. The Narodnik faith in the peasant commune and the Narodnik brand of anarchism fully explain why such conclusions are inevitable.

To the Marxist, the peasant movement is a democratic, not a socialist, movement. In Russia, just as was the case in other countries, it is a necessary concomitant of the democratic revolution, which is bourgeois in its social and economic content. It is not in the least directed against the foundations of the bourgeois order, against commodity production, or against capital. On the contrary, it is directed against the old, serf, pre-capitalist relationships in the rural districts, and against landlordism, which is the mainstay of all the survivals of serf-ownership. Consequently, full victory of this peasant movement will not abolish capitalism; on the contrary, it will create a broader foundation for its development, and will hasten and intensify purely capitalist development. Full victory of the peasant uprising can only create a stronghold for a democratic bourgeois republic, within which a proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie will for the first time develop in its purest form.

These, then, are the two contrasting views which must be clearly understood by anyone who wishes to examine the gulf in principles that lies between the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Social-Democrats. According to one view, the peasant movement is socialist, while according to the other it is a democratic-bourgeois movement. Hence one can see what ignorance our Socialist-Revolutionaries reveal when they repeat for the hundredth time (see, for example, *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya*, No. 75) that orthodox Marxists have ignored the peasant question. There is only one way of combating such crass ignorance, and that is by repeating the ABC, by setting forth the old consistently Narodnik views, and by pointing out for the hundredth or the thousandth time that the real distinction between us does not lie in a desire or the non-desire to reckon with the peasant question, nor in recognition or non-recognition of it, but in our different appraisals of the present-day peasant movement and of the present-day peasant question in Russia. He who says that the Marxists ignore the peasant question in Russia is, in the first place, an absolute ignoramus since all the principal writings of Russian Marxists, beginning with Plekhanov's *Our Differences* (which appeared over twenty years ago), have in the main been devoted to explaining the erroneousness of the Narodnik views on the Russian peasant question. Secondly, he who says that the Marxists ignore the peasant question thereby proves his desire to avoid giving a complete appraisal of the actual difference in principles, giving the answer to the question whether or not the present-day peasant movement is democratic-bourgeois, whether or not it is objectively directed against the survivals of serfdom.

The Socialist-Revolutionaries have never given, nor will they ever be able to give, a clear and precise answer to this question, for they are floundering hopelessly between the old Narodnik view and the present-day Marxist view on the peasant question in Russia. The Marxists say that the Socialist-Revolutionaries represent the standpoint of the petty bourgeoisie (are ideologists of the petty bourgeoisie) for the

very reason that they cannot rid themselves of petty-bourgeois illusions and of the Narodnik imaginings in appraising the peasant movement.

That is why we have to go over the ABC once again. What is the present-day peasant movement in Russia striving for? For land and liberty. What significance will the complete victory of this movement have? After winning liberty, it will abolish the rule of the landlords and bureaucrats in the administration of the state. After securing the land, it will give the landlords' estates to the peasants. Will the fullest liberty and expropriation of the landlords do away with commodity production? No, it will not. Will the fullest liberty and expropriation of the landlords abolish individual farming by peasant households on communal, or "socialised", land? No, it will not. Will the fullest liberty and expropriation of the landlords bridge the deep gulf that separates the rich peasant, with his numerous horses and cows, from the farm-hand, the day-labourer, i.e., the gulf that separates the peasant bourgeoisie from the rural proletariat? No, it will not. On the contrary, the more completely the highest social-estate (the landlords) is routed and annihilated, the more profound will the class distinction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat be. What will be the objective significance of the complete victory of the peasant uprising? This victory will do away with all survivals of serfdom, but it will by no means destroy the bourgeois economic system, or destroy capitalism or the division of society into classes-into rich and poor, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Why is the present-day peasant movement a democratic-bourgeois movement? Because, after destroying the power of the bureaucracy and the landlords, it will set up a democratic system of society, without, however, altering the bourgeois foundation of that democratic society, without abolishing the rule of capital. How should the class-conscious worker, the socialist, regard the present-day peasant movement? He must support this movement, help the peasants in the most energetic fashion, help them throw off completely both the rule of the bureaucracy and that of the landlords. At the same time, however, he should explain to the peasants that it is not enough to overthrow the rule of the bureaucracy and the landlords. When they overthrow that rule, they must at the same time prepare for the abolition of the rule of capital, the rule of the bourgeoisie, and for that purpose a doctrine that is fully socialist, i.e., Marxist, should be immediately disseminated, the rural proletarians should be united, welded together, and organised for the struggle against the peasant bourgeoisie and the entire Russian bourgeoisie. Can a class-conscious worker forget the democratic struggle for the sake of the socialist struggle, or forget the latter for the sake of the former? No, a class-conscious worker calls himself a Social-Democrat for the reason that he understands the relation between the two struggles. He knows that there is no other road to socialism save the road through democracy, through political liberty. He therefore strives to achieve democratism completely and consistently in order to attain the ultimate goal-socialism. Why are the conditions for the democratic struggle not the

same as those for the socialist struggle? Because the workers will certainly have different allies in each of those two struggles. The democratic struggle is waged by the workers together with a section of the bourgeoisie, especially the petty bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the socialist struggle is waged by the workers against the whole of the bourgeoisie. The struggle against the bureaucrat and the landlord can and must be waged together with all the peasants, even the well-to-do and the middle peasants. On the other hand, it is only together with the rural proletariat that the struggle against the bourgeoisie, and therefore against the well-to-do peasants too, can be properly waged.

If we keep in mind all these elementary Marxist truths, which the Socialist-Revolutionaries always prefer to avoid going into, we shall have no difficulty in appraising the latter's "latest" objections to Marxism, such as the following:

"Why was it necessary," *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* (No. 75) exclaims, "first to support the peasant in general against the landlord, and then (i.e., at the same time) to support the proletariat against the peasant in general, instead of at once supporting the proletariat against the landlord; and what Marxism has to do with this, heaven alone knows."

This is the standpoint of the most primitive, childish naive anarchism. For many centuries and even for thousands of years, mankind has dreamt of doing away "at once" with all and every kind of exploitation. These dreams remained mere dreams until millions of the exploited all over the world began to unite for a consistent, staunch and comprehensive struggle to change capitalist society in the direction the evolution of that society is naturally taking. Socialist dreams turned into the socialist struggle of the millions only when Marx's scientific socialism had linked up the urge for change with the struggle of a definite class. Outside the class struggle, socialism is either a hollow phrase or a naive dream. In Russia, however, two different struggles of two different social forces are taking place before our very eyes. The proletariat is fighting against the bourgeoisie wherever capitalist relations of production exist (and they exist-be it known to our Socialist-Revolutionaries-even in the peasant commune, i.e., on the land which from their standpoint is one hundred per cent "socialised"). As a stratum of small landowners, of petty bourgeois, the peasantry, is fighting against all survivals of serfdom, against the bureaucrats and the landlords. Only those who are completely ignorant of political economy and of the history of revolutions throughout the world can fail to see that these are two distinct and different social wars. To shut one's eyes to the diversity of these wars by demanding "at once", is like hiding one's head under one's wing and refusing to make any analysis of reality.

The Socialist-Revolutionaries, who have lost the integrity of the old Narodnik views, have even forgotten many of the teachings of the Narodniks themselves. As the self-same *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* writes in the same article: "By helping the peasantry to expropriate the landlords, Mr. Lenin is unconsciously assisting in building up petty-bourgeois economy on the ruins of the more or less developed forms of capitalist agriculture. Is not this a 'step backward' from the standpoint of orthodox Marxism?"

For shame, gentlemen! Why, you have forgotten your own Mr. V. V.! Consult his *Destituty of Capitalism*, the *Sketches* by Mr. Nikolai-on, [6] and other sources of your wisdom. You will then recollect that landlord farming in Russia combines within itself features both of capitalism and of serf-ownership. You will then find out that there is a system of economy based on labour rent, which is a direct survival of the *corvée* system. If, moreover, you take the trouble to consult such an orthodox Marxist book as the third volume of Marx's *Capital*, [7] you will find that nowhere could the *corvée* system develop, and nowhere did it develop, and turn into capitalist farming except through the medium of petty-bourgeois peasant farming. In your efforts to scatter Marxism to the winds, you resort to methods too primitive, methods too long ago exposed; you ascribe to Marxism a grotesquely oversimplified conception of large-scale capitalist farming directly succeeding to large-scale farming based on the *corvée* system. You argue that since the yield on the landlords' estates is higher than on the peasant farms the expropriation of the landlords is a step backward. This argument is worthy of a fourth-form schoolboy. Just consider, gentlemen: was it not a "step backward" to separate the low-yielding peasant lands from the high-yielding landlords' estates when serfdom was abolished?

Present-day landlord economy in Russia combines features of both capitalism and serf-ownership. Objectively, the peasants' struggle against the landlords today is a struggle against survivals of serfdom. However, to attempt to enumerate all individual cases, to weigh each individual case, and to determine with the precision of an apothecary's scales exactly where serf-ownership ends and pure capitalism begins, is to ascribe one's own pedantry to the Marxists. We cannot calculate what portion of the price of provisions bought from a petty shopkeeper represents labour-value and what part of it represents swindling, etc. Does that mean, gentlemen, that we must discard the theory of labour-value?

Contemporary landlord economy combines features of both capitalism and serfdom. But only pedants can conclude from this that it is our duty to weigh, count and copy out every minute feature in every particular instance, and pigeon-hole it in this or that social category. Only utopians can hence conclude that "there is no need" for us to draw a distinction between the two different social wars. Indeed,

the only actual conclusion that does follow is that both in our programme and in our tactics we must combine the purely proletarian struggle against capitalism with the general democratic (and general peasant) struggle against serfdom.

The more marked the capitalist features in present-day landlord semi-feudal economy, the more imperative is it to get right down to organising the rural proletariat separately, for this will help purely capitalist, or purely proletarian, antagonisms to assert themselves the sooner, whenever confiscation takes place. The more marked the capitalist features in landlord economy, the sooner will democratic confiscation give an impetus to the real struggle for socialism -- and, consequently, the more dangerous is false idealisation of the democratic revolution through use of the catchword of "socialisation". Such is the conclusion to be drawn from the fact that landlord economy is a mixture of capitalism and serf-ownership relations.

Thus, we must combine the purely proletarian struggle with the general peasant struggle, but not confuse the two. We must support the general democratic and general peasant struggle, but not become submerged in this non-class struggle; we must never idealise it with false catchwords such as "socialisation", or ever forget the necessity of organising both the urban and the rural proletariat in an entirely independent class party of Social-Democracy. While giving the utmost support to the most determined democratism, that party will not allow itself to be diverted from the revolutionary path by reactionary dreams and experiments in "equalisation" under the system of commodity production. The peasants' struggle against the landlords is now a revolutionary struggle; the confiscation of the landlords' estates at the present stage of economic and political evolution is revolutionary in every respect, and we back this revolutionary-democratic measure. However, to call this measure "socialisation", and to deceive oneself and the people concerning the possibility of "equality" in land tenure under the system of commodity production, is a reactionary petty-bourgeois utopia, which we leave to the socialist-reactionaries.

Footnotes

[1] Proudhonism -- a school of thought named after Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), a French petty-bourgeois socialist and anarchist. Though a sharp critic of capitalist society, Proudhon failed to understand that the only way to end poverty, inequality, exploitation and other evils of capitalist relations is to abolish these relations.

Blanquism -- a trend in the French socialist movement represented by the prominent revolutionary and exponent of utopian communism Louis Auguste

Blanqui (1805-1881). The Blanquists, Lenin wrote, "expected that mankind will be emancipated from wage slavery, not by the proletarian class struggle, but through a conspiracy hatched by a small minority of intellectuals" (V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 10, p.392). p.5

[2] Narodism -- a petty-bourgeois trend in the Russian revolutionary movement of the 1860s and 1870s. p.6

[3] A reference to the revolutionary actions of the peasants of Poltava and Kharkov gubernias in the Ukraine (Little Russia) at the end of March and the beginning of April 1902. They were precipitated by the extremely hard condition of the peasants aggravated by crop failure and famine. The peasants attacked landowners' estates, seized food and forage, and demanded redistribution of the land. The movement was put down with severity. p.6

[4] Bernsteinism -- an opportunist trend in the international Social-Democratic movement at the close of the nineteenth century. It took its name from the revisionist, Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932), leader of the extreme Right wing of the German Social-Democratic Party and the Second International. Bernstein opposed revolutionary struggle by the working class and the dictatorship of the proletariat, preached collaboration of the proletariat and bourgeoisie, and brandished his notorious slogan, "the movement is everything, the final aim is nothing", substituting struggle for reforms within the framework of the bourgeois state for the revolutionary struggle for socialism. p.6

[5] Socialist-Revolutionaries (S.R.s) -- a petty-bourgeois party in Russia formed at the end of 1901 and the beginning of 1902. Its official organs were the newspaper *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* (Revolutionary Russia) (1900-05) and the magazine *Vestnik Russkoi Revolutsii* (Herald of the Russian Revolution) (1901-05). p.6

[6] V. V. -- pseudonym of V. P. Vorontsov, author of the book, *The Destiny of Capitalism in Russia*. Nikolai-on -- pseudonym of N. Danielson, author of the book, *Sketches on Our Post-Reform Social Economy*. Vorontsov and Danielson were ideologists of liberal Narodism in the 1880s and 1890s. p.11

[7] See Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, Chapter XLVII ("Genesis of Capitalist Ground-Rent"). p.12

From: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/oct/25.htm>

Course: Anti-Imperialism, War and Peace

17043, Lenin, Petty-bourgeois and Proletarian Socialism, 1905

3431 words